

An Eco-critical Study of Shaikh Ayaz's Poetry

Muhammad Hassan Shaikh, Rubina Shaheen

Abstract

Literature reflects human behavior and depicts the natural surroundings in which it is penned. It is believed that the environment occupies a big deal of description in various forms of literature viz. novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies, dramas, prose, poetry, etc. as it is the part and parcel of human life. The present research paper attempts to investigate ecocriticism in the poetry of Shaikh Ayaz, a major voice of the 20th Century Sindhi poetry. Ecocriticism is described as the study natural world. It shows a cemented relationship between literature and the environment. It is observed that no writer is ever detached from his environs. Likewise Shaikh Ayaz has portrayed natural surroundings, in his poems, artistically and aesthetically. The method of textual analysis has been used to carry out the current study. The findings exhibit that Shaikh Ayaz has employed an ample use of ecocriticism to make his poetry rich with natural beauty and the depiction of landscapes.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Sindhi poetry, nature, land & life, description, environment

Introduction

Shaikh Ayaz is recognized as one of the trendsetter poets of 20th century Sindhi poetry. He is a modern verse-writer whose poetry has influenced generations of Sindh. He began composing verses at a young age and within a short span of time his poetry echoed into every nook and corner of Pakistan in general, but of Sindh in particular. Commenting on his towering poetic contribution, Dilgir (2007) argues that Shaikh Ayaz is a beloved poet of Sindh whose artistically rich verses have captivated thousands of souls not only in Sindh and Hind but overseas too. His poetic heritage keeps appealing to the intellectual circles and common folk simultaneously. Commenting upon his towering poetic stature, Pirzada & Farrukhi (1999) are of the view that "In his own life time he was called 'the Voice of Sindh'. Shaikh Ayaz is for Sindh what Garcia Lorca is to Spain, Pablo Neruda is to Latin America, Yannis Ristos to Greece, and Nazim Hikmet to Turkey_____ a poet of the earth and people, steeped in the folklore and the rich traditions of the soil that nourished his imagination" (p.12). Pirzada & Farrukhi have described his worth considerably comparing him with great giants of the world literature. But Girglani (2007)



arguing about his poetry writes “when I read his books.....I was transported to a new world, felt a great pride in being a Sindhi not because of the posterity that Sindhis in India have attained in 50 years_____no mean achievement_____but because our language even to-day has literature and poetry of this timeless, ageless, spaceless dimensions and excellence” (p.14). Girglani has presented a realistic picture of his state of mind which he has experienced while going through Shaikh Ayaz’s creative works. To him, Shaikh Ayaz is the pride and intellectual asset to Sindh.

In this connection, Jaleel (1998) is of the view “literature created by Shaikh Ayaz was immensely affected by the national and international events between the years 1940 to the year of his passing away, 1997. He reacted, commented, and registered his dissent on the social, cultural, and political incidents of his era. His entire literature is testimony to what happened in the world during the last 60 years, and how the lives and the sensibilities of the people were affected by the terrible upheavals in the history” (p. 17). Jaleel points out that the poet keenly observed various local and global events and incidents of history. He recorded in his poetry and prose what he had practically experienced during his life.

Shaikh Ayaz not only coined several new Sindhi words but also liberated Sindhi poetry from the alien influence of Persian and Arabic languages. He used local and regional themes to develop the canvas of his verses. In this regard, Joyo (1970) mentions “having taken out from books, Ayaz enriched his language giving it freshness and vastness” (p.28). Joyo states that he didn’t follow the footprints of his predecessors who wrote poetry in Persian style rather he freed his verses from foreign influence and invented local colours. Acknowledging Shaikh Ayaz’s intellectual poetic caliber, Farrukhi (1998) states “beyond doubt the greatest living poet in any language of Pakistan, Shaikh Ayaz was for me a cultural hero” (p.37). Farrukhi has depicted his distinct position among Pakistani poets and lovingly calls him a cultural champion. Shaikh Ayaz’s poetry echoes with universality. He vastly read classics of English, Urdu, Persian, Latin, Greek and Arabic literature. After a careful reading of his poetry, it is revealed that Shaikh Ayaz has presented a variety of subjects in his poetry but natural facet of his verses is significantly great that needs to be investigated. It has been observed that a detailed study on ecocriticism has not been undertaken before. This study opens a new phase of further research on the subject.

Literature Review

Ecocriticism is a modern literary theory which establishes the strong relationship between man and his natural surroundings. In other words, ecocriticism is related to environmental literature. Oppermann (1999) states that ecocriticism being a new literary theory landed in the field of literary criticism and got its acceptance across the world. It attempts to make a noticeable relationship of literary studies with ecological affairs.

It is observed that the ecocriticism was probably first introduced in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”.

By ecocriticism Rueckert meant "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (As cited by Glotfelty, p.20). His views are concerned with environmental science. Apart from science of ecology, he also presents the relations between literature and the physical world. In support of Rueckert's point of view, Glotfelty (1996) believes that ecocriticism discusses the link between literature and physical surroundings. She has portrayed that ecocriticism functions as a literary theory like feminism and Marxism. It shows a strong connection between literature and our environs. In this regard, Childs & Fowler (2006) explain "Ecocriticism is the study of literary texts with reference to the interaction between human activity and the vast range of 'natural' or non-human phenomena which bears upon human experience – encompassing (amongst many things) issues concerning fauna, flora, landscape, environment and weather" (p.65).

But Jimmy (2015) mentions "an ecocritic does whatever is pleasing to him, in green fields; in the sky, in the seas, on the hard ground, in the zoos, and in all parts of his world. He makes the clouds speak, the animals and garden flowers smile and share lots of faculties with man because, in the view of the writer, there's a close link between human and nonhuman" (p.370). In this regard, Glotfelty (1996) points out that ecocriticism reveals philosophy that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman" (p.20).

Ecology or environmentalism is intimately related to humans and the world of nature. When we begin to discuss environment the relation between man and nature truly comes up. This close bond of man and nature has been presented by English Romantic Poets like William Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and other poets subsequently. Sultana & Saleem (2016) point out "romantic poetry, the literary epoch of the adoration of nature, became the icon of ecocritical studies" (p.2). Their views are somehow truthful that it was during the Romanticism that nature, for the first time, played her independent and dominant role in the poetry. Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*, Keats' *The Autumn*, Shelley's *The West Wind* and many other poems highlight the colors of ecocriticism.

In this connection, Shaikh Ayaz, a modern poet of Sindh, is also seen exercising this relationship in his poetic contribution. His poetry displays the spirit of revolution, the elements of patriotism, the power of resistance, mystic jewels, etc yet he is not lagging behind in ecocriticism. Being a highly intellectual, he was completely well aware of his physical surroundings. Rural solitude, countryside scenes, landscapes, peasants, laborers, industrial workers, bare-footed villagers are used frequently to portray natural life of villages.

The following research questions have been designed to seek the relevant answers.

Research Questions

- Q1. Does Shaikh Ayaz's poetry represent ecocritical concepts?
- Q2. How do Shaikh Ayaz's poems illustrate environmental issues concerned with society in general?

Research Methodology

The present study falls in the category of qualitative research. Textual analysis is chosen to investigate the selected poems of Shaikh Ayaz in the light of ecocritical theory.

Data Analysis/Discussion

The selected texts for the analysis are given below along with English translation in order to analyze the ecocriticism found in Shaikh Ayaz's poetry.

کٽي هنيءَ کانپاڻي هن کي، ڪيئ نہ ڪو ڪهڪاءِ،
ننڍڙا نينگر، هن ڳيري کي تو وانگر آ ماءُ.

Translation:

**Taking no pity, you slung it
Like you, the little one!
The dove, too, has a mom
(Noonari, 2006, p.24-25)**

In this couplet, Shaikh Ayaz introduces to the readers a world of natural life where a child is seen shooting at the dove for his childhood pleasure. Shaikh Ayaz draws our attention and softly prohibits the child from shooting at the innocent bird which makes this universe beautiful with its twittering and charming presence. The shooting of the dove can put the surroundings into the state of fear and gloom. Like you the bird also has its loving mother. Through this and many other poems, he wants to remind us that man and the physical world are closely connected. We should not shed blood of innocent creature just for the joys.

چء چء چيهي کي،
متيءَ هاڻا پيرڙا،
تانگرتي نہ رکي.

**Ask, ask *Cheeho* (a local bird popular in Sindh)
Hinder to keep dusty feet
On the bough of the tree.
(Ayaz, 1998, p.024).**

Like Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, Shaikh Ayaz's poetry carries a great deal of romantic elements. His deeper study and minute observation reveal before us captivating

images of natural beauty. In the above piece of poetry, he artistically has framed a stunning poetic scene of a bird who is habitually sitting on the branch of a tree. Shaikh Ayaz as a sensitive soul appeals to the viewer/gardener to communicate to the bird that thy dirty/dusty feet can bring about harmful effects on the beautiful bough. Your perch can damage its outlook and attraction. Though both are part of nature yet Shaikh Ayaz does not like the bird to land and destroy the inner and outer beauty of the bough. The act of the bird violates the nature and its setting in general. Therefore, we should care for nature and environmental harmony so that the fresh leaves of the tree may not be polluted. Moreover, we can play our positive role to protect nature and herald this message publicly.

اسان اُتي موٽي وڃڻ چاهيون ٿا،
 جتي ساريون، انهن جا سنگ، انهن جا تيلا،
 انهن جون ٿڀيون اسان جي ٻولي ڄاڻن ٿيون،
 جتي سياري جي اُس ۾ ويٺل ڀڳهه اسان جي ٻوليءَ ۾،
 سڃاتا وڃن ٿا.
 آسان اُتي موٽي وڃڻ چاهيون ٿا.

Translation:

**We wish to return there
 where paddy, their corn, their straw,
 their roots know our language
 Where cranes basking in the winter sun
 are identified in our language
 We wish to return there.**

(Girglani, 2007, p.55-57)

This piece of a poem signals returning to village life where nature celebrates her joys, away from the smoke of the city and industrial pollution which has seriously caused harmful effects on human life. Man has been trapped into a number of deadly diseases because he is leading a miserable life deprived of nature's company. The poet focuses on the importance of countryside life loaded with fresh air, lovely breeze and grassy environment. Apart from the above presented view, it also speaks volumes of patriotism. People should love their country as laying down life for the mother land is a noble cause. Here it is clearly observed that (Glottfelty, (1996) statement proves right. She believes that ecocriticism brings about a unity between man and nature with "one foot in literature and the other on land" (p.xix).

اي سنڌ تون ماءُ آهين،
 مان تنهنجي ڌرتيءَ مان شاعريءَ جو مواد،
 ائين حاصل ڪندو آهيان،
 جيئن ٿر جي ڳاڙهي ڳانءِ جي اُرهڻ مان ان جو وڇڙو
 کير پيئندو آهي.

Translation:

Oh Sindh, you are Mother
I draw from your earth,
Material for my poems as the calf sucks
Milk from the udders of the red cow of Thar.
 (Girglani, 2007, p.69)

Here, it has been noticed that there is an impressive and artistic presentation of natural images by the poet. He, very confidently, acknowledges that the land of Sindh provides him the matter for composing poems. In other words, his verses are engulfed in the beauty of nature. He shows his great affection for Sindh and its countryside including the region of *Thar* which is barren and deprived of modern mode of life but it offers dynamic power and strength to the poet. He considers his native land as the mother whose milk provides him energy and vigor in all respects.

Findings

Shaikh Ayaz's poetry presents a vast number of themes from nationalism to internationalism. The current study has explored and analyzed objectively the selected poems of Shaikh Ayaz in the light of ecocriticism. The study also reveals the relationship between man and nature. It also helps the readers to develop a better understanding of the ecology and attain tranquility in an age of suffocation and pollution. This study may be useful in establishing Shaikh Ayaz as one of the most powerful poets of all times.

Shaikh Ayaz carries unique poetic visions to educate us with the environment around us. His course is entirely different than that of being taught at schools and colleges. Shaikh Ayaz, through the mode of his verses, teaches us how to be environment friendly people to protect our natural assets. To him, our finest survival lies with natural surroundings. If we cannot protect them and do not take care of them, environmental diseases can make our life a hell. It is observed that his poems are loaded with natural scenes and sights. These poems often depict his intellectual philosophy of the environmental manifestation. They also exhibit man's relationship with his background.

Conclusion

Shaikh Ayaz is not only a poet of educated classes but also a poet of common people. His poetry presents him as an activist of ecology. His several poems exhibit him as an environmentally conscious poet. He believes that man and nature are part and parcel of each other. They are inseparable. If any attempt is made to separate them, their bond of closeness is broken and resultantly man suffers from this shock.

References

- Ayaz,S.(1998). *Pan chhan pujana*. (2nd ed.). Hyderabad: New Fields.
- Bate, J. (2000). *The song of the earth*. London: Picador.
- Childs, P., & Fowler,G. (2006). *The routledge dictionary of literary terms*. London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Cuddon, J.A (2013). *A dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (5th ed). UK: Wiley Blackwell.
- Dilgir, H. (2007, March 2nd). Foreword. *Immortal poetry of Shaikh Ayaz*.Khairpur: Shaikh Ayaz
- Chiar, Shah Abdul Latif University. pp.9-11.
- Farrukhi,A. (1998). Shaikh Ayaz to eternity where he belongs. In Mirza, N. (Eds.), *Shaikh Ayaz: Sami Sijj Wara'o 1998*, (pp.33-38). Hyderabad. Ali Balaj Publishers.
- Girglani, (2007). *Immortal poetry of Shaikh Ayaz*. Khairpur: Shaikh Ayaz Chiar, Shah Abdul Latif University.
- Glotfelty, C., & H. Fromm (Eds.), (1996). *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Jaleel,A.(1998). Legend leaves. In Mirza, N. (Eds.), *Shaikh Ayaz: Sami Sijj Wara'o 1998*, (pp.16-19). Hyderabad: Ali Balaj Publishers.
- Jimmy, B.N. (2015). Ecocritical approach to literary text interpretation. *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research*, 18(2), 369-378.
- Joyo, M. (1970). Preface. *Ki jo Beejal bolio*. Hyderabad. Ibne Hayat Publication.
- Rueckert.W (1978). Literature and ecology: An experiment in ecocriticism. In Glotfelty, C., & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology*. 1996. (pp.xx). Athens: University of Georgia Press.

- Noonari, L.(2006). *On the bank of Indus: Selected Poetry of Shaikh Ayaz*. Khairpur: Shaikh Ayaz chair, Shah Abdul Latif University.
- Oppermann,S. (1999). *Ecocriticism: Natural world in the literary viewfinder*. http://www.asle.org/wp-content/uploads/ASLE_Primer_Oppermann.pdf.
- Pirzada, S.M & Farrukhi, A. (1999). *The storm's call for prayers: Selected poetry of Shaikh Ayaz* .Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Potkay, A. (2008). Wordsworth and the ethics of things. *PMLA*, 123. (2),390-404
- Sultana, E., & Saleem, T.(2016). Wordsworth's the Prelude: A manifesto of ecocriticism. *Journal of Literature, Language & Linguistics*, 19, 1-4.